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ABSTRACT

This paper is a brief description of a conference presentation consisting of a 2.5-hour clinic session on decision-making. A motion picture, "The Making of a Decision," followed by a lively discussion, was used to illustrate the strenghts and weaknesses of administrators in their decision-making process. Presented in the film are three different ways that administrators act when in doubt about their decisions, and three different ways they handle their anxieties and stresses. After viewing the first half of the motion picture, the participants listed the strengths and weaknesses three managers portray in their decision-making skills. The participants then viewed the supervisor of these three managers conducting appraisal conferences with each of them, helping them to identify their own weaknesses in decision-making. The participants then assumed the role of the supervisor and made a decision. After a thorough analysis of the content of the motion picture by the presentor and the participants, each participant listed several specific ways they could immediately improve their decisions and reduce their stress levels. (TE)

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STRESS IN DECISION-MAKING

Three Causes, Three Cures

A Clinic Session Presented To The
Ninth Annual Conference of the
National Council of States on Inservice Education

by
Dr. Don Bates
McNeese State University

Orlando, Fla.
September, 1984

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STRESS IN DECISION-MAKING

3 Causes, 3 Cures

This presentation was a two and one-half hour clinic session presented at the 9th annual NCSIE conference. A motion picture* and a lively-led discussion was used to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses administrators use in their decision-making process. Presented are three different ways administrators act when in doubt about their decisions and three different ways they handle their anxieties and stress.

After viewing the first half of the motion pictures, the participants listed the strengths and weaknesses three managers portray in their decision-making skills. The participants then viewed the superior of these three managers conducting excellent appraisal conferences with each of them, helping them to identify their own weaknesses in decision-making. The participants then assumed the role of the superior and made a decision. Most participants have so much fun making and defending their decisions that they forget to utilize the seven steps of decision-making presented in the motion picture. After a thorough analysis of the content of the motion picture by the presentor and the participants, each participant listed several specific ways they could immediately improve their decisions and lessen their stress levels.

STRESS IN DECISION-MAKING

3 Causes, 3 Cures*

Administrators and supervisors are known as: active, decisive, energetic, highly competent, intense, logical, perceptive, well-planned, and organized persons. They are also known as subjective, procrastinators,

capable of jumping to conclusions when it comes to decison-making, however, these three weaknesses and individual stressors can be corrected in order to alleviate individual and organizational stress.

Since all decisions involve risks and uncertainties and since there are many factors over which we have no control, we use a decision-making process to minimize our risks. Equally important, we must recognize that it is not just the decision itself but our fear of it, the way we react to it that causes us to make poor decisions. We must realize that we have better opportunities to do something about our own feelings of uncertainty that changing tough situations. We can lessen our stress by improving how we make our decisions. We can lessen our stress by avoiding the pitfalls of poor decision-making--subjectivity, procrastination and jumping to conclusions.

Subjectivity

Many times our uncertainties about decisions cause us to play it safe and rely on the people we know and equipment with which we are familiar. When we build up ways of looking at things and people and restrict ourselves with employees and equipment, we limit our objectivity. We close our minds and try to simplify problems and answers, but it is not that easy. We are shortchanging ourselves. What appears to be a safe, low-risk decision can cost us more than we think--a wrong decision.

Most of us are so subjective we do not realize it until we see when someone is not being objective with us. It takes a real effort to stop and look at the problem and to think what preconceptions we might have that limits our objectivity.

When we are objective, we enable all, not some, of our employees to demonstrate their compentencies and experience success. Being more objective in our decision-making reduces stress among individuals in our organization and lessens our stress in decision-making as well. What counts is how effectively we make our decisions.

Procrastination

Searching for that perfect answer may be a disguise for procrastination. It is a matter of intent. How many times have we stalled on making a decision, hoping the situation would improve itself and we would not have to stick our necks out? How many times have we been afraid not of making a mistake, but of what people would think about us for making it? When time becomes critical, no action in itself is a decision.

Management consists of taking chances. Sometimes we have to accept the alternatives that lead to our objectives and continue searching for better alternatives--but let's not miss the boat while we search. Establishing deadlines will help lessen our stress induced by procrastination and make us better decision-makers.

Jumping to Conclusions

On the other hand, many of us jump to conclusions to get that good feeling of being on our way with a decision--but to where?

Temporary relief from the anxiety of having made a decision is not worth the cancer created by a wrong decision. Knowing where we are going and using the rational decision-making process will significantly improve our performance and reduce our stress levels.

Management expects us to move fast and we are under pressure to get things done. But how much of that pressure is placed upon us and how much do we place on ourselves? Slowing down our decision-making process is perhaps the easiest weakness to correct. "Sleeping on it" will help reduce this weakness and lessen our stress in decision-making. With practice, sleeping on it will help reduce our anxiety levels as well.

Seven Suggested Steps

Good decision-making entails identifying the objective, gathering relevant data, evaluating the data, developing alternatives (tenative decisions), calculating the risks, making the decision, and following it through. Following these written steps will help us to remain objective, refrain from jumping to conclusions and to meet our deadlines without "dying" from self-induced stress and anxiety.

* This paper is a brief description of a two and one-half hour clinic session presented by Dr. Don Bates, McNeese State University to the Ninth Annual Conference of the National Council of States on Inservice Education held in Orlando, Florida, November 16-20, 1984.

The motion picture, "The Making of A Decision", is available through Roundtable Films, Inc., 113 North San Vicente Blvd., Beverly Hills, California, 90211 and most of the above content is used with their permission.